

Education and Employment: Critical for Securing Peace for Gypsies in Iraq



Sarah Edgcumbe

MERI
Middle East
Research Institute

www.meri-k.org

Executive Summary

Gypsies have been living in both Iraq and the KRI for centuries, contributing to the country's cultural diversity. Nonetheless, they have occupied a unique social positionality characterised by stigmatisation at all levels of society, including government institutions. Since 2003 in Mosul, and since 2008 in the KRI, there has been an evident reluctance on the part of both governments and NGOs to recognise, and respond to, the humanitarian, development, and protection needs of Gypsy populations. This has rendered Gypsies vulnerable during conflict, displacement, or state fragility. Stigmatisation has also marginalised Gypsy communities, excluding them from public services, support provision or peacebuilding initiatives. The widespread, insidious nature of anti-Gypsy racism and discrimination has enabled the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to neglect the needs of Gypsy communities in post-conflict Iraq without consequence.

This policy paper and comparative analysis briefly examines experiences of conflict, displacement and post-conflict priorities, as narrated by Gypsy communities in Dohuk Municipality and Mosul. Foremost among these priorities are access to a safe environment, good healthcare, and quality education for their children – basic human rights that Gypsy children in neither location are currently able to enjoy adequately. This policy paper urges the Government of Iraq and the KRG to respond to the needs of their Gypsy populations – to facilitate intentional, considered, and long-term assistance and protection which will raise Gypsy communities out of a desperate cycle of poverty, and fully integrate them into society as equals.

(1) Key Recommendations for the Iraqi Federal and/or Kurdistan Regional Governments:

A) *Identity and Human Rights*

- Consult Gypsy communities across Iraq and the KRI to establish their needs, priorities, and perspectives on development, community rights, social cohesion, peace, and citizenship.
- Design and roll out anti-discrimination, sensitisation, and public awareness campaigns aimed at countering negative stereotypes about Gypsies.
- Prioritise distribution of ID cards for Gypsies which do not state the ethnicity of the bearer.
- Provide Gypsy homes (including Rizgari village) with infrastructure (e.g. paved streets) and public services.

B) *Education*

- Identify suitable partners with experience in education and minority inclusion to design and deliver training for teachers on inclusive education and non-discrimination.
- Facilitate children's access to primary and secondary schools, by removing barriers and providing government-funded transport for those school-aged children who must walk further than 1km to school.
- Review and amend the education curriculum across both Iraq and KRI so that when learning about minorities, students learn that Gypsies are natives and have contributed to society in many ways.
- In Rizgari specifically, the KRI should provide a purpose-built primary school with the capacity to provide all primary-aged children in the village with quality education.

C) *Employment*

- Alongside private and public institutions, explore ways in which to improve employment opportunities for young men and women from Gypsy families across Iraq and the KRI through affirmative action. Such avenues into employment could include subsidised vocational training and paid apprenticeships.

(2) Key Recommendations for Civil Society and Peacebuilding Organisations

- Proactively network with Gypsy community leaders and any organisations already working with Gypsy communities to identify shared priorities.
- Prioritise inclusivity of dialogue-based events and activities by inviting Gypsy community leaders to participate.
- Promote recognition of Gypsies as natives of Iraq and the KRI and include Gypsies in any social cohesion initiatives or campaigns.
- Focus on reducing discrimination against Gypsies, rather than supporting policies and initiatives which place the onus on Gypsies to integrate without addressing the multiple barriers they face.

1. Introduction

Romani Gypsies have been present in Iraq since the sixth to eighth centuries,¹ while Kurdish Gypsies believe themselves to have originated from the Mukriyan Principality which existed from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries in what is now north-west Iran.² Gypsies, both Romani and Kurdish, have lived in Iraq and contributed to its culture for centuries. The total Roma/Gypsy population of Iraq is unknown, but is estimated to be between 50,000 – 200,000, including the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).³ Iraq's Roma/Gypsy population has historically resided on the outskirts of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra.⁴ 'Roma are not homeless or rootless as commonly portrayed. While maintaining their own culture and separate identity throughout the centuries, the Roma have always been immersed to some extent in local traditions and economic networks.'⁵

Despite their deeply rooted presence however, Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish Gypsies have endured discrimination and disproportionate structural violence (defined here as unequal distribution of power, resources, and opportunities) for decades, if not more. Gypsies in Iraq and the KRI occupy a unique social positionality among other minority groups due to the stigmatisation they experience. This stigmatisation frames Gypsies in Iraq as promiscuous sex workers, and reduces all Gypsy communities – in both Iraq and the KRI – to the stereotypical trope of beggar, thief, and one who cannot be trusted, or to a one-dimensional musician and singer. Society does not accommodate heterogeneity in its construction of Gypsies, and as such, if a Gypsy is not a successful musician, they are assumed to be problematic in terms of their morality and assumed occupation as beggar.

Begging currently represents a key policy issue in the KRI,⁶ yet there seems to have been no corresponding investigation of the causes. Much less has there been an accompanying policy or strategy (in either federal Iraq, or the KRI) to combat the structural conditions which leave begging the only option for many Gypsies. While there has been much research conducted, much funding allocated, and many programmes dedicated to 'minorities' in Iraq and the KRI, Gypsies have been consistently excluded from all.

As far as the author is aware, this research represented the first academic study to be conducted with Kurdish Gypsies at all, and certainly the first academic research with Gypsies from Mosul which focuses on conflict and peace. This gap in research and lack of interest may be symptomatic of the severe marginalisation of Iraq's Gypsy communities. As a result, very little has been published about them, and they have been virtually erased from the socio-political landscape.

Since 2003 in Mosul, and since 2008 in the KRI, there has been an evident reluctance on the part of both governments and NGOs to recognise, and respond to, the humanitarian, development, and protection needs of Gypsy populations. This constitutes an abandonment of Gypsies which is underpinned by anti-Gypsy, and anti-Roma stereotypes and discrimination. It is well recognised across both Iraq and the KRI that Gypsies frequently live lives saturated by absolute poverty, and are discriminated against by all levels of society, including government institutions. Failure to take intentional and long-term action to support Gypsy communities will result in an ongoing cycle of severe poverty, poor health, and absence of social cohesion. Such inaction also exacerbates protection risks, particularly for women and children who are forced to beg, and for Gypsies in Mosul who are perceived as members or supporters of IS.

This policy paper will present the disproportionate challenges faced by Gypsies in Iraq and the KRI through two case studies: Rizgari, a Gypsy village near Dohuk city in the KRI, and Mosul city in Federal Iraq. It will first summarise experiences of conflict and post-conflict "peace" as expressed and narrated by research participants, before presenting the indicators of peace (as defined by participants) and their relationship with development and social cohesion. Finally, policy recommendations will be presented to stakeholders.

2. Methods

The objective of this research was to develop a nuanced and contextual understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Gypsies in relation to peacebuilding, combined with an analysis of Gypsy conceptualisations of peace itself. Given the unique social positionality inhabited by Gypsies, which is significantly shaped and constrained by stigmatisation, the necessity of gaining a depth and richness of understanding, rather than a broader survey of numbers affected, was considered critical.

The evidence base for this policy paper was generated through semi-ethnographic research in the village of Rizgari, near Dohuk, combined with semi-structured interviews in Mosul. A process of stratified sampling was adopted to ensure diversity of research participants (in terms of age, gender, social positionality, and perspective) in both research sites (Rizgari and Mosul). In Rizgari, nine semi-structured interviews and five focus group discussions (each involving four to six participants) were conducted over a period of two months with the Hosta (Kurdish Gypsy sub-clan) community. Seven semi-structured interviews were also conducted with relevant non-Gypsies residing in Dohuk. These were supplemented with frequent informal discussions with non-Gypsies from Dohuk. In Mosul, due to the contextual challenges associated with conducting semi-ethnographic research as a non-Iraqi researcher, only semi-structured interviews were conducted. Four of these were facilitated with nine Gypsies of different ages and genders. Additional insight was provided by a research assistant whose family have roots in Mosul.

All research was subject to informed voluntary consent, with all participants being made aware that they could withdraw at any time. Critically, all participants were provided with the option of anonymisation. Only those participants who explicitly requested that they be cited by name have been.⁷

3. Findings

3.1 Labelling

Mindfulness of the words and labels used when referring to, or talking with, Gypsies is necessary. Labelling of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities is a complex and sensitive issue, as labels can impose and affirm otherness, convey stigmatisation, and constitute a form of political violence. Across Iraq and the KRI, there is also the challenge of how to discuss or write about Romani (or Domari, Dome) communities and Gypsies who self-identify as 'Gypsies', but do not self-identify as Romani/Domari. Adding to this heterogeneity are Kurdish ethnic groups such as Hosta who do not share Romani origins, but sit within the broader Gypsy umbrella, yet increasingly reject the stigmatisation associated with the label 'Gypsy', and so insist upon 'Hosta' instead. This is a challenge to be grappled with, but as far as possible, it is preferable to use the labels that these groups use themselves, rather than those labels imposed upon them by others – particularly as commonly used labels (such as Qaraj and Kawliya) are extremely pejorative.

Gypsies in Mosul identified as such (though they also identified by either clan name, or "Hosta" depending on origin). Meanwhile, among Hosta in the KRI, community leaders identified themselves as Gypsies, despite the "ordinary" residents of Rizgari pleading to be recognised as Hosta for labelling purposes. For Hosta, the term "Ghajar" is acceptable, being a close translation to the word 'Gypsy'. However, they are frequently referred to as "Qaraj" which connotes begging and homelessness and is thus stigmatising. The majority of Hosta prefer to be labelled as such because contrary to negative stereotypes, "Hosta" conjures the traditional craftsmanship they were once famous for. Fajer (Fakher) Hazm, a Hosta community leader, teacher, and member of the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities explained that he prefers to use the label 'Gypsy' when not exclusively referring to Hosta, as it encompasses all groups (Romani/Domari, Gypsies, Hosta, Mukri, and

others) who share a broader identity and culture.⁸ For this reason, and for ease of writing, 'Gypsy' is the label that will be used throughout this policy paper.

3.2 Duhok's Gypsies

With the exception of two blog pieces produced from this research,⁹ there has been hardly any published data on Kurdish Gypsies' experiences of conflict and displacement. Saddam Hussein and his regime targeted Kurdish Gypsies in the same way as other Kurds, and Kurdish Gypsies view this shared ordeal as evidence of their Kurdish identity; an identity and nationalist ideal with which they strongly identify.

Duhok's Kurdish Gypsies have strong memories of the fear wrought by Saddam's campaign of ethnic cleansing, followed by the struggle for survival which characterised their displacement in the Turkish mountains. Extreme hunger and exposure to the elements due to lack of shelter and adequate clothing were the defining memories of many who had been displaced. Many research participants also lost loved ones during their time in displacement, with adults and children alike drowning during river crossings, or dying of exposure, hunger, or illness. Displacement for Kurdish Gypsies from Dohuk Municipality was therefore a time of great hardship and loss. This was compounded upon their return as a result of their houses and belongings having been destroyed, combined with the discrimination they face.

For several years after their return to the KRI, Dohuk's Gypsy population was forced to squat in former government buildings or live in tents. Some of these buildings were contaminated with unexploded ordinance, and one woman stated that her nephew sustained life-altering injuries as a result of accidentally detonating an explosive device whilst living in this situation. When the government cleared the area of people, the Gypsies moved to the outskirts of Dohuk city in an area called Aluka. There, once again, they were forced to live in tents or build rudimentary shelters from mud until 2008, when the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) completed the construction of the village of Rizgari.

3.2.1 The Marginalisation of Rizgari's Gypsies

In 2007, the KRG began constructing the village of Rizgari specifically for Dohuk's most impoverished Gypsies. The village was both a means through which to provide housing for families living in makeshift shelters in Aluka, and clearing the squatted land, as it was too close to an *Asayish* (security) base. The newly built village of Rizgari contained 264 houses and a mosque,¹⁰ and was located approximately twenty to thirty minutes drive from Dohuk city centre. In 2008, 260 Gypsy families moved into the village. Four families chose to reside elsewhere, leaving four empty houses (each house comprises one small kitchen, one small toilet, one small reception area, and one small living area). Although the residents of Rizgari who participated in this research all expressed sincere gratitude for the housing, they also expressed feelings of abandonment and isolation since they moved there, outside Duhok city.

It is telling that when the village was built, there was no plan to provide a primary school, reflecting a widely held stereotype that "Gypsies are not interested in education". Instead, it was agreed with Dohuk Municipality that the four unwanted houses would be converted into a rudimentary primary school. Government teachers are now provided, though the quality of education provided is unknown, and the school buildings themselves are inadequate for purpose. Conversations with teachers and school staff during this research revealed discriminatory attitudes. Interestingly, the school's Director emphasised his role in teaching children 'not to beg', over providing students with a well-rounded education. Exacerbating the situation, Rizgari is serviced by no public transport, including school buses, despite nearly half of its population of 3,000 being children, and despite there being no secondary school in the village. Taxis are the only form of transport available to the majority of Rizgari's residents, and these are prohibitively expensive, rendering access to education, healthcare, or employment opportunities unfeasible for many residents.

The conditions of Rizgari village are a visual representation of structural violence, with poverty being both pre-existing condition and a consequence. The streets in Rizgari are not paved despite all roads surrounding the village being properly surfaced. In the summer months the streets are dust and dirt, and during rainy periods they turn to mud. The women of the community complained again and again that they feel they are fighting a never-ending battle with mud and dirt as a result of these conditions. During rainy weeks they often keep their children out of primary school, on the premise that the students will be too muddy by the time they arrive (and thus further reinforce the perception of being “dirty”).

3.2.2 Villagers with settlement rights, not Travellers

There is a common misunderstanding in the KRI at least, that Gypsy populations are nomadic. As one Kurdish academic questioned during an interview, ‘paved roads for what? They are always travelling, they rarely stay in their homes.’¹¹ This is a falsity which neither researchers nor governmental institutions have bothered to correct. In fact, while a small number of men from Rizgari travel for a few weeks or months of the year, the majority of the population remains in the village year-round, and therefore does require paved roads. Paved roads, adequate rubbish collection, provision of healthcare, suitable housing, consistent electricity supply – these are all community development actions which will directly contribute to peacebuilding. Community development will contribute towards sustainable peace first, by making Gypsy communities feel valued as equal citizens; and second, a reduction in poverty will result in reduced begging and improved living standards, which, in conjunction with public awareness campaigns, will contribute to reduced stigmatisation and improved social cohesion.

Recommendations

- In Rizgari specifically, provide a purpose-built primary school with the capacity to provide all primary-aged children in the village with quality education.
- Provide Rizgari village with paved streets as a matter of priority. The community has been asking for this for years and deem it to be a priority.
- Ensure that Rizgari is serviced by a mobile health clinic at least one day per week.

3.3 Mosul’s Gypsies: post-displacement

Displacement patterns of Mosul’s Gypsies in response to IS capturing Nineveh were varied. Some research participants fled to a village near Dohuk, but unassisted, and facing severe discrimination by the host community there (which included having rocks thrown at them, and being threatened with robbery), they opted to return to Mosul. Others fled to Kirkuk and remained in the city, again, unassisted, until IS had been removed. Still, others fled to cities such as Erbil and Sulaymaniyah in the KRI. The majority opted for self-settlement on the peripheries of urban areas and formal camps, while a small minority sought shelter inside formal camps. The unwillingness of Gypsy internally displaced persons (IDPs) to seek shelter in formal camps is likely a result of the stigmatisation, discrimination, and sometimes physical attacks that they are subjected to. As one research participant explained, “they [non-Gypsies] are ok until they know we are Gypsies, then they discriminate.”

The humanitarian community has consistently failed to recognise, support, or protect Mosul’s Gypsies since the city was occupied by the so-called Islamic State (IS), despite the trauma this occupation inflicted.¹²

3.3.1 Unique Protection Needs of Mosul's Returned Gypsies

The majority of Mosul's Gypsies who had been residing in the KRI returned to the city in late 2022 and early 2023. This return was unassisted, despite their social positionality presenting distinct protection needs. Mosul's Gypsies have experienced targeted discrimination since at least 2003,¹³ but since IS took the city, an additional and concerning layer of discrimination has emerged. There is a widely held perception in the city that Gypsies in Mosul joined IS, and specifically, that they planted explosives for the terrorist group. The Gypsies from Mosul who participated in this research stated that they are often accused of such IS membership, in addition to the long-running tropes that they are thieves, and they are uncivilised. This seems to be taking a particular toll on the younger generations. One Gypsy woman said, "we fear for our children", because "our problems and theirs are not alike."

This newly emerged conflation of Mosul's Gypsies with IS and terrorism presents a significant protection gap which is not currently being addressed. A 2019 report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) described perceived IS affiliates as 'the most vulnerable beneficiaries that humanitarians serve',¹⁴ while the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) stated in the same year that 'the stigmatization of ISIL-affiliated IDPs makes them vulnerable to retaliation both in camps and in their communities of origin.'¹⁵ Research participants were steadfast in their assertions that no Gypsies in Mosul joined IS, yet the perception they did join IS remains and has taken root.

3.3.2 Institutional Discrimination Against Gypsies in Post-IS Mosul

Gypsies who participated in this research in Mosul reported facing serious challenges in obtaining identification documents (ID). In 2019, Iraqi law changed regarding provision of identity documentation for Iraqi Gypsies.¹⁶ In a move to curb discrimination, ID documents for Gypsies which previously stated their ethnicity, were to be replaced with cards which did not. Despite this law being introduced over four years ago, research participants in Mosul still held ID cards which contained their ethnicity. Aside from the discrimination this exposes them to from service providers and employers, Gypsies in Mosul also complained bitterly about the discrimination they face from local government officials. They described how, when they go to local government offices, officials first ask them for a financial amount which they cannot afford, and then deliberately delay the paperwork. Concerningly, they also stated that government officials in Mosul will not administer ID cards for members of the Gypsy community until they are between twelve and fifteen years old.

Additionally, Mosul's Gypsies complain that they are often prevented from passing through checkpoints or entering government offices. One man described the humiliation of having to beg security staff at checkpoints to be permitted through, explaining "they make you feel like a clown, saying "these are Hosta, these are Hosta" and such", referring to discriminatory treatment Gypsies receive as a result of their identity. One woman meanwhile told of her experience being kicked out of a government office by an official who shouted at her "go away, you are Ghajar, go to Baghdad." The obvious inference here was that Gypsies are neither recognised, nor welcome as residents of Mosul, despite their centuries-long presence.

An Iraqi-based lawyer and human rights activist cautioned that even if Iraqi Gypsies are granted non-discriminatory ID cards, "they are still rejected by the Iraqi community. They are not able to access hospitals, universities, or schools. There is even discrimination when they try to find a job."¹⁷ During an informal conversation, this same lawyer explained that in her experience, the majority of human trafficking victims in Iraq are Gypsy girls and women, precisely due to this lack of documentation combined with their reliance on street-based forms of income generation such as begging and selling tissues and gum. These obvious

protection issues are rooted in institutional discrimination and exacerbated by the social discrimination faced by Mosul's Gypsy community.

Recommendations

- Consult with specialised non-governmental organisations (such as the Alliance for Iraqi Minorities and Minority Rights Group International) to design and roll out anti-discrimination public awareness campaigns aimed at countering negative stereotypes about Gypsies.
- Take intentional and concerted action to attend to the protection needs of Gypsies in Mosul as perceived IS-affiliates.
- Establish an anonymous complaints mechanism for users of local government offices and public service provision which is accessible for non-literate individuals.
- Roll out anti-discrimination training for local authority employees as a matter of priority.

3.4. Education Discrimination and Violence in Schools

Among research participants, some had children who attended school, but others did not. Discrimination by both school staff and other students was cited as a significant barrier to accessing quality education for Gypsy children in Mosul. All participants however were unified in their desire for their children to access education within a safe learning environment. Discussing Gypsy children and education, one research participant explained “we want them to go to schools, actually, they do [want to go to school], but the children hit them, hurt them, and call them “Qaraj”.”

This bullying and physical violence within schools was a common theme throughout narratives presented by research participants in Mosul. Some parents understandably felt it safer that their children be removed from the school environment as a result, but other parents encouraged their children to continue with their education despite the violence – for one father in particular, it was his dream that his children would achieve a college education, and he was extremely proud of them for remaining in school despite everything. Some parents also reported discrimination and lack of support from teachers when it came to Gypsy children, reinforcing the fact that schools in Mosul are extremely hostile places for Gypsy children.

What Mosul's Gypsies would like is a safe, inclusive education for their children, combined with eradication of employment discrimination. In this way, their children could access college and become professionals, in turn supporting their families and gradually lifting the community out of poverty. Under current circumstances however, this remains a utopian dream, as it feels like Iraq has turned it's back on them.

Recommendations

- Provide government-funded transport for school-aged children (primary and secondary) who must walk further than 1km to school.
- Identify suitable partners with experience in education and minority inclusion to design and deliver training for teachers on inclusive education and non-discrimination.
- Along with education partners, review and update school policies and codes of conduct on anti-discrimination and inclusion.
- Review and amend the education curriculum across both Iraq and KRI so that when learning about minorities, students learn that Gypsies are natives and have contributed to society in many

ways.

- Offer scholarships for those Gypsy students who complete secondary school and would like to attend university to train as teachers. By ensuring that Gypsy teachers are present within schools, discrimination against Gypsy students will be reduced, and positive role models from the Gypsy community will be visible for youth.

3.5 Employment Discrimination

3.5.1 Unemployment and Begging among Gypsy Youth in the KRI

Unemployment among youth in the KRI is currently a significant problem for the entire population,¹⁸ but young Gypsy men in Dohuk are disproportionately affected. The majority of young Gypsy men who participated in this research could not read or write, and were unemployed. They longed for the ability to generate a sustainable income through working in cafes or similar roles, but without a basic education, such opportunities remain an unattainable dream for many. When asked if they would prefer to have access to education, they all agreed that if their families had sufficient income, they would have preferred to gain a secondary then university education, citing jobs such as doctor, lawyer, and policeman as their dream jobs.

Begging takes various forms in Dohuk and includes transactional begging such as selling tissues and gum, as well as sitting in public spaces, and also knocking on people's doors. Begging has become increasingly taboo within the community of Rizgari, but Gypsies who participated in this research acknowledged that some Gypsies do beg. However, they consistently emphasised that it is due to necessity, and to ensure the survival of their children and families rather than an actual choice. Begging brings a great sense of shame to those who must practice it (both men and women), and it also positions Gypsies in places and interactions where they experience the most obvious discrimination in terms of being insulted as "Qaraj", or otherwise verbally mocked and abused. One young woman who begs occasionally to supplement her husband's income and provide for their child, described how she suffers feelings of fear and anxiety whenever she leaves Rizgari, due to the negative experiences she has had with people in Dohuk whilst begging.

3.5.2 Employment Discrimination and Begging Among Gypsies in Mosul

Research participants in Mosul city all spoke of the employment discrimination they face as a community, which has contributed to social isolation. Few among Mosul's Gypsies are literate, which limits their opportunities dramatically. Compounding this, they explained that potential employers refuse to hire them if they learn they are Gypsies. As one participant lamented, '[since the creation of the Iraq state], I swear to God we haven't seen a single Hosta making it in the government, becoming a teacher, a secretary for a doctor, I am telling you, only 25% of us know reading and writing.'¹⁹

As a result of employment discrimination, women are generally the breadwinners among Gypsy communities in Mosul. They beg as a means of generating income – not because they want to, but out of sheer necessity – as one older woman explained "if we do not beg our children will starve to death." However, this reliance on begging puts Gypsy women in situations which make them particularly vulnerable to verbal abuse and sexual harassment – frequent occurrences according to an elderly female research participant.

Employment opportunities are a vital means through which to improve living conditions and reduce social isolation for Gypsy communities in both Iraq and the KRI. However, absence of education and employment discrimination present significant barriers to employment. Making education accessible for Gypsy children and youth will contribute to improved opportunities for future generations. However, these improved opportunities will remain limited if employment discrimination remains. Within this context, anti-discrimination campaigns targeting majority society alongside non-Gypsy minorities would contribute

towards increased opportunities for Gypsies, as would affirmative action in the employment sphere.

Recommendations:

- Alongside businesses and public institutions, explore ways in which to improve employment opportunities for young men from Gypsy families across Iraq and the KRI through affirmative action. Such avenues into employment could include subsidised vocational training and paid apprenticeships.
- Prioritise distribution of ID cards for Gypsies in federal Iraq which do not state the ethnicity of the bearer.
- Focus on reducing discrimination against Gypsies, rather than formulating policies and initiatives which place the onus on Gypsies to integrate without addressing the multiple barriers they face.

3.6 Indicators of Peace.

Peace can be seen to have failed Gypsies in both Iraq and the KRI. Every aspect of their everyday lives is saturated by structural violence, and this in turn negatively shapes their interactions with non-Gypsies. They are stigmatised, unassisted, and in Mosul particularly, unprotected.

As part of this research in the KRI, focus groups were held in which participants were asked to identify indicators of peace which relate to their everyday lives. The results demonstrated that negative stereotypes about Gypsies being uninterested in education are a complete myth. They also illustrated the disjuncture between liberal peacebuilder's emphasis on individual and political rights, and the collective, socio-economic rights which are prioritised by the residents of Rizgari. Focus groups discussions (FGDs) were conducted with young men aged 18 -22 (this was the pilot focus group, Pilot Y M), young men (Y M) and women (Y F) aged 18-35, older men (O M) and women (O F) aged 36 and above. Every single focus group cited access to primary and secondary education as their priority, making it the most voted-for indicator. Provision of a health clinic and paved streets in the village were the second most voted-for indicators. The indicators provided by the youngest group of men and the young women also emphasised aspects of social cohesion, such as: support from non-Gypsies; the ability to take pride in their Gypsy identity; and respect and maintenance of their culture. This emphasis on social cohesion likely reflects the fact that it is younger adults who most often must resort to begging, therefore, they most often experience negative interactions with non-Gypsies in Dohuk city. Similarly, young women and young men both identified 'no discrimination or hate speech' as an important indicator of peace.

Indicators of peace identified during focus groups:

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with young men aged 18 -22 (this was the pilot focus group, Pilot Y M), young men (Y M) and women (Y F) aged 18-35, older men (O M) and women (O F) aged 36 and above.

	Paved Streets	Political Promises Kept	Health Clinic	Schools	Refurb' mosque	Better houses	Clean Water	Access to Dohuk	No Discrimination / Hate Speech
Pilot Y M									
Y F FGD									
O F FGD									
Y M FGD									
O M FGD									

Y = younger, O = older, M = male, F = female

	Literacy	Support from others (non-Gypsy)	Freedom and pride (head high)	Good relationships with non-Gypsies	No more poverty / social mobility	Respect for / maintenance of culture	Good employment	Residential integration	Owning a car
Pilot Y M									
Y F FGD									
O F FGD									
Y M FGD									
O M FGD									

Analysis of semi-structured interviews with research participants in Mosul found a great deal of synthesis between priorities expressed by the two groups of Gypsies (in Mosul and Rizgari). Both groups emphasised the need for education, literacy, eradication of discrimination and hate speech, improved community relations and social cohesion. The biggest variant was the much greater emphasis placed on employment opportunities by Gypsies in Mosul.

3.7 Gypsies perspectives for Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion in Iraq and the KRI

If Gypsies are praised for anything in Iraq and the KRI it is their avoidance of political conflict, and their deliberate abstention from violence against other communities.²⁰ They have participated only in state-sanctioned armed conflict. For example, many Gypsy men from Rizgari joined Kurdish *Peshmerga* in the fight against IS, and fifteen of those men were martyred during the battle.²¹ Similarly, many Iraqi Gypsy men joined Saddam’s forces in the Iran-Iraq war,²² though perhaps uniquely, Gypsies have been unable to claim any form of compensation for their lost sons through Law No.20 (2009).²³ Gypsies avoid conflict with non-Gypsies as a survival mechanism, which makes them very easy for the government and INGOs to overlook. However, their refusal to engage in armed resistance to their position at the bottom of the hierarchy of citizenship should not be misunderstood as contentment.

In recent years Gypsy communities across Iraq and the KRI have been taking a more contentious, visible stand for their rights,²⁴ often utilising national media in doing so.²⁵ Further to a meeting between Iraqi Gypsy community leaders and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), a UN report from 2020 stated that: ‘A taskforce... was created earlier this year, comprising the Co-existence and Societal Peace Committee under the Prime Minister’s Office, [Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights] IHCHR and two NGOs together with UNAMI. The taskforce is already working on a housing project in Baghdad for the community, with plans underway. The taskforce will partner with the relevant Government entities to support the project to completion and to tackle other challenges raised.’²⁶ It was not possible to source any further information on this task force, nor any progress made on the proposed housing project, which indicates that it has likely stalled.

Economic barriers to education should be addressed where they exist, through provision of school transport, school supplies and school uniforms. Youth Speak NGO,²⁷ is the first NGO in the KRI to work with a Gypsy

community in this way. The NGO started a pilot project in the autumn of 2023 through which it provided a transport bursary, school supplies, and school uniforms to a small number of selected students from Rizgari who had recently completed primary school. The project is currently small due to meagre funding. Ultimately however, support provision should be provided by the KRG, to ensure sustainability.

Alongside economic barriers to education, discrimination must be addressed. Schools should consistently provide protective environments for all students, regardless of ethnicity. Anti-discrimination policies and codes of conduct must be introduced by school administrators for staff and students alike. Gypsy children should actively be made to feel welcome by all school staff, as well as the student body.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

- Consult with Gypsy communities across Iraq and the KRI to establish their needs, priorities, and perspectives on development, social cohesion, and citizenship.
- Nation-wide policies are required to facilitate improved peacebuilding for Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish Gypsies. These should centre socio-economic development, in response to the priorities identified by Gypsies who participated in this research.

Recommendations for Civil Society and Peacebuilding Organisations

- Proactively network with Gypsy community leaders and any organisations already working with Gypsy communities to identify shared priorities.
- Prioritise inclusivity of dialogue-based events and activities by inviting Gypsy community leaders to participate.
- Promote recognition of Gypsies as natives of Iraq and the KRI and include Gypsies in any social cohesion initiatives or campaigns.

Conclusion

To date, Gypsies in Iraq and the KRI have been constructed by both governmental institutions and the public as problematic “others” who exist on the periphery of society out of choice. There has been a complete reluctance on the part of both the KRG and the Federal Government of Iraq to recognise the disproportionate structural violence experienced by Gypsy communities – and rooted in discrimination and stigmatisation at all levels of society. This structural violence, alongside corresponding negative stereotypes trap many Gypsies in a cycle of endless poverty and discrimination. Rather than policing poverty by clamping down on begging, a complete policy reversal is required which emphasises Gypsies as full citizens of Iraq and the KRI, and which seeks to identify and address the barriers to development, peace, and social cohesion Gypsies face.

It is clear that at this moment, Gypsies are not experiencing peace. In Mosul, in the absence of any palpable governmental or non-governmental assistance, Gypsies have developed a sense of hopelessness. In the KRI meanwhile, Gypsy residents of Rizgari feel abandoned and betrayed by their fellow Kurds.

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¹ Richardson K, 'Roma in the Medieval Islamic World', 2023, p22.

² Conversation with Younis Piro, Kurdish Gypsy community leader, March 2023.

³ Minority Rights Group International, 'Iraq: Roma', World Directory, updated November 2017 (accessed 7 December 2023); and European Asylum Support Office, 'Targeting of Individuals: Iraq', EASO Country of Origin Information Report, March 2019, p151.

⁴ European Network on Statelessness and the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion. 'Statelessness in Iraq', Country Position Paper, November 2019, p13.

⁵ Matras Y, 'I Met Lucky People', 2015, p34.

⁶ Interview with a Kurdish academic, Dohuk, 8 March 2023.

⁷ Angela Lederach cautions against blanket anonymisation where participants explicitly request to be cited, as it contributes to the silencing of marginalised voices. See: Lederach A, 'Each Word is Powerful': Writing and the Ethics of Representation', Ch.32 in Mac Ginty R, Brett R and Vogel B (eds), *The Companion to Peace and Conflict Fieldwork*, 2021, p464-465.

⁸ Interview conducted remotely on 11 February 2023. Faxer resides in Erbil.

⁹ Edgcumbe S, "'They are breaking our hearts": Kurdish Gypsies, identity, and social (in)cohesion, *Institute of Middle East, Central Asia, and Caucasus Studies*, University of St Andrews, 18 May 2023; and Edgcumbe S, 'Rizgari: A Bubble of Unsafe Safety in a "Peaceful" Post-Saddam Landscape', *Uniform November*, 20 March 2023.

¹⁰ Interview with Jaseem Ibrahim Haji, currently Senior Engineer with Peace Winds NGO, but former Lead Engineer for the construction of housing in Rizgari. Interview conducted remotely on 9 March 2023.

¹¹ Interview conducted in Dohuk on 8 March 2023.

¹² Edgcumbe S, 'Roma in Iraq and Syria: On the Margins of IDP Protection', *Research Internal Displacement*, Working Paper No.9, 2 December 2021.

¹³ Research participants in Mosul spoke of the persecution they faced after the U.S Coalition invasion, which caused many to flee to Syria for several years.

¹⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019', November 2018, p22.

¹⁵ IOM, 'West Mosul: Perceptions on Return and Reintegration Among Stayees, IDPs, and Returnees', June 2019, p23.

¹⁶ The New Arab, 'Iraq's persecuted 'gypsy' community granted national ID cards', 3 April 2019.

¹⁷ Interview conducted remotely on 16 August 2023.

¹⁸ Fazil S, 'Understanding the roots of the younger generations' despair in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq', *Arab Reform Initiative*, 2023.

¹⁹ Faxer Hazm is Hosta residing in Erbil. He is the only Hosta teacher in the whole of the KRI. However, his family fled Iraq when he was a small child, and he attained his primary, secondary, and university education in Iran before returning to the KRI. His education trajectory, and the quality of education received likely sets him apart from other Hosta, yet he told the author that he experiences discrimination even from government officials working on minority projects who should know much better. It is unknown whether there are any Hosta or Gypsy teachers in Federal Iraq, but it seems there are none in Mosul.

²⁰ During informal conversations with non-Gypsies in Dohuk which were not characterised by overt anti-Gypsy prejudice, it was common to be told "we love Gypsies because they are poor". One or two speakers more explicitly stated "we love Gypsies because they do not create trouble", referring to political violence.

²¹ Focus groups with younger and older Gypsy men in Rizgari: 12 February 2023 and 14 February 2023 respectively.

²² Interview with Baghdad-based lawyer, 16 August 2023; and Zeidel R, 'Gypsies and Society in Iraq: Between Marginality, Folklore and Romanticism', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 50(1), 2014, p79.

²³ Interview with Baghdad-based lawyer, 16 August 2023.

²⁴ UNAMI, "'We want to live like other Iraqis" – Roma representatives meet with UNAMI Human Rights Office and IHCHR.

²⁵ Dosky A K, 'Iraqi Kurdistan's Gypsies Want to vote: No More Singing and Dancing', EKurd Daily, 8 June 2012; Younis Piro, *Mokhtar* of Rizgari, frequently utilises local and national media to advocate for community development of the village.

²⁶ UNAMI, "'We want to live like other Iraqis'" – Roma representatives meet with UNAMI Human Rights Office and IHCHR.

²⁷ <https://www.youthspeakngo.org/>

Sarah Edgcumbe is a PhD candidate with the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews. She holds an MA in conflict studies and human rights from Utrecht University and an MA in refugee protection and forced migration studies from the University of London's School of Advanced Studies. Her research interests are the interrelationship between conflict, gender and minorities and the role of grassroots activism and resistance in society within a conflict or post-conflict context.

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